

“The Business of All of Us is a Gamble Anyway” 1919–1922

H. W. CHILD, 1921

A new era for Yellowstone National Park began in 1919. Horace Albright was selected as the park’s first civilian superintendent since the 1880s. Albright’s attention to park development and his mere presence would directly affect the course of concessions.

National Park Service Director Mather urged the formation of a National Park Service division of travel to coordinate with other travel organizations and resorts in the country and to “meet the competition of Europe from the beginning of its renewed activity” after the end of World War I. Interest in the national parks was reflected in the enormous numbers of requests for information pouring into the Washington office; the office received several hundred requests a day during the spring of 1919. Thousands of park visitors traveled across the country by rail, but large numbers also traveled in their private automobiles, some staying in the park hotels and permanent camps while others used their personal camping equipment in the free campgrounds.

In 1919, 62,261 visitors came to Yellowstone; this was three times the 1918 visitation figure. Records show that 10,737 private automobiles brought 39,886 tourists to the park that year, with more than half of these people bringing their own camping equipment. During 1919, conventions were held in a number of parks, and inter-park tours brought in many more people. The Montana’s Banker’s Association, the National Touring Association, the Western Governor’s Conference, the Brooklyn Eagle Tour, the International Association of Rotary Clubs, the Massachusetts Forestry Association, the Travel Club of America, and

members of the United States Chamber of Commerce all met in the park during 1919.¹

Because the popularity of independent and organized camping was burgeoning, the National Park Service landscape engineer, Charles Punchard, Jr., strove to improve the camping companies. With his aid a complete camp system was planned for Yellowstone.²

Superintendent Albright, who did not assume his new position until July 1, began making his presence felt just after the New Year. In a letter to A. W. Miles, President of the Yellowstone Park Camping Company, Albright recommended improvements for the various camps and urged Miles to submit his drawings and site locations for early approval. After several meetings with Miles in California, Albright had Punchard’s comfort station and bathhouse drawings sent to him.



Yellowstone Park Camp Company tents—Upper Geyser Basin. 1917.

These early National Park Service-designed bathhouses provided eight tub baths and wash basins, two showers, six toilets, an attendant's room, and linen closet in the women's building and six showers, two tub baths, five toilets, linen room, and eight wash basins for the men's building; both buildings housed a heating plant. These log buildings were designed to be compatible with the main building in the campground.³

In May 1919, the former head of the United States Railroad Administration's Bureau of Service, National Parks and Monuments, and the former general advertising manager of the Union Pacific and North Western Railroad, Howard Hays, bought the Yellowstone Park Camping Company. Director Mather believed Hays would bring to Yellowstone a distinct advantage based on his experience in the recreational and educational aspects of travel across the country.⁴

During this record year, visitors often found the campgrounds overcrowded and the hotels and permanent camps "overflowing," perhaps in part a result of the Lake facilities being opened on an emergency basis only. However, good service at all locations was reported by the visitors, despite a severe shortage of good help.⁵

Sensing the trend would not change for the 1920 season, plans were made to get Lake Hotel and camp into good condition before the season opened. The Lake Camp was being rebuilt and extensive repairs to the hotel were completed during 1919.⁶

Camp Roosevelt, which began as a Wylie camp in 1906 and was renamed in 1913, operated near Lost Creek for two months during the summer. Mr. Albright reported that, "This camp is destined to be very popular as a fishing and riding resort. It is in the neighbor-

hood of some of the best fishing waters of the park, and is a radiating point for numerous very interesting trails."⁷

By 1919, automobile services, gasoline, oil, garages, and repairs were offered at Mammoth Hot Springs, Lake, Canyon, and the Upper Geyser Basin, and plans were made to sell automobile parts at these places the following year.⁸ The Yellowstone Park Transportation Company and George Whittaker jointly operated the filling stations at Mammoth and Canyon with Whittaker owning the Canyon station and the transportation company owning the station at Mammoth. The filling stations at Upper Geyser Basin and Lake were jointly operated by the Yellowstone Park Transportation Company and Charles Hamilton with Hamilton owning the two stations.⁹

The rush of visitors to the parks in 1919 and again in larger numbers in 1920 led Director Mather to claim that despite "trying economic conditions throughout the country, inflated values, increased prices of labor and materials have caused disturbances in every line of human activity and contributed to the general unrest of the masses, [and thus] our people have turned to the national parks for health, happiness, and a saner view of life." The visitation across the system broke the million mark in 1920, with Yellowstone accounting for 79,777 people. Of that number, 30,286 visitors came by rail, and the others traveled to the park by private automobile.¹⁰

With the tremendous increase in the numbers of travelers to parks across the country and the resulting impact on concessions and their operations, the concessioners were praised by the National Park Service for meeting the unusual demands on the park facilities. New regulations required all new construction and any remodeling be approved by the agency's



Camp Roosevelt. 1922.



Camp Roosevelt interior. 1922.

landscape engineer, and Director Mather urged the concessioners to undertake an “organized scheme of development” using “intelligent, well-prepared plans for submission to the landscape engineer.”¹¹

Shortly after Superintendent Albright arrived in Yellowstone in 1919, he quickly grasped the concession situation and assessed the major companies’ attributes and deficiencies. However, Director Mather decided to deal personally with the Yellowstone Boat Company situation. He disliked the company’s uneasy financial position and wanted it to clean up the Lake area. He wanted to see a thriving boat business in Yellowstone, something the park had not seen since 1916.

Mather wrote to one of the three owners, Howard Elliot, President of the Northern Pacific Railroad, and explained that he had not pursued a change in the situation during the war because other more important problems faced the park. He recognized that not having scheduled business at Lake diminished the possibilities of a good return, but upon inspection in 1919, he found the boats and buildings in a “serious state of disrepair, and in fact I found much of it already useless.” The harsh weather had taken a toll on the boats beached near the hotel, and the *E. C. Waters*, anchored on Stevenson Island, was being beaten to ruins by the waves. The piers, landings, and buildings were “almost wholly wrecked.” Mather called the buildings the “most unsightly in the park” and ordered Superintendent Albright to remove them before the 1921 season opened. Mather asked the boat company to either comply with their contract or sell the property and allow the Interior Department to find a new company to operate boats on Yellowstone Lake.¹²

H. W. Child, another of the boat company owners (Warren Delano of New York was the third), believed that Mather had only superficially reviewed the situation and that during the few days Mather spent in the park, he had been with parties of personal friends and most of his attention was to “the social nature of the trip.” Child felt that Mather “gave us an arbitrary order and does not consider in any way the effect his orders will have on the care and handling of the tourists and no argument that I have found seems to penetrate; he is a good deal like President Wilson in his autocratic ways.” Harry Child wanted to settle the problem after Albright returned to the park, as he believed the Superintendent had a different view of the situation from Director Mather. However, Child recognized that Albright would not be in “any position to criticize his chief and must of course carry out his or-



Heavers at Mammoth Lodge. 1925.

ders.” Child just hoped that Albright could change Mather’s views.¹³

While Child was counting on Albright to support his position on the boat company, he realized that Albright was there to put the concessions in order and to get the park ready to meet the needs of the ever-growing numbers of people who wanted to enjoy the wonders of Yellowstone. Albright wrote a comprehensive, candid report on Child’s Yellowstone Park Hotel Company and Yellowstone Park Transportation Company at the end of the 1920 season. The report identified finances of the companies, the companies’ attitudes toward the government, needed improvements, and recommendations for the betterment of the park. For the hotel company, Albright concluded:

that the company needed to enlarge the Mammoth hotel dining room, more rooms added some with baths, and the hotel should be painted. Old Faithful Inn should be enlarged by a new wing of rooms, with and without baths, lobby should be enlarged, and grounds should be planted with shrubbery and grass; Lake hotel needs many more rooms with and without baths, a new annex should be built for the rooms, lobby, and dining room; the grounds should be planted and otherwise improved from the standpoint of landscape architecture. The old hotel [which Albright called the ‘weakest link of the chain’] should be painted. Canyon needs a large dining room, the exterior and roof need new stain, and the grounds improved. The old Fountain Hotel and lunch stations at Thumb

and Norris should be dismantled, torn down, and the valuable lumber salvaged. Dining room service could be improved by use of more fresh fruit and vegetables. Company [should] be directed by Park Service to pay its porters, bell-boys, and waiters high enough wages to mitigate the tipping evil to a considerable extent. That all guiding hereafter be handled by the National Park Service. This will require about four more rangers. That the present wood-cutting policy be made permanent and strictly enforced. That curtailment of service during the last thirty days of the season be prohibited. That the basis of compensation for the franchise be changed to two and one half or three per cent of the gross revenues, in order that all branches of the hotel establishment shall bear their share of the Government tax and in order to afford an easier means of ascertaining what the Government should receive.¹⁴

In addition to the hotel company needs, Albright wanted Yellowstone Park Transportation Company to purchase at least 20 cars for the next season's operation.¹⁵

Albright had been in the park only slightly more than a year, but he quickly ascertained the problems and potential problems with concessioners who had had free reign over the management of their businesses. He felt that perhaps "threat of competition in the operation of the transportation line or in the maintenance of gasoline and supply stations would bring these companies in line quicker than anything else."¹⁶

In contrast to his assessment of the Child operations, he found Jack Haynes to be:

one of the best men to deal with that we have in any national park; not only is he interested in the development of the parks, but he is also willing to help in the work of the National Park Service whenever and wherever possible. I will say further that no rule or regulation, request or policy, which has affected Mr. Haynes has had anything but his respect and strict compliance. I have found it a pleasure to do business with him at all times, and I wish that all of the other operators in Yellowstone National Park were as interested in the work of the Service and as easy to get along with as Mr. Haynes is.¹⁷

Early in 1921, H. W. Child was in a struggle with Director Mather over reducing the rates he owed the government in order for his companies to make a profit. While the previous year the government had investigated the charges of "double-bookkeeping" brought against the transportation and hotel companies, the retired company accountant had cleared up any misconceptions. Child explained to Mather that through the years he had met his financial obligations mainly based "entirely on personalities and long standing friendships, and not on any financial report of any kind." He pointed out that he had tried to meet the ever-changing needs of the visitors despite the many changes in government officials and the railroads. He wrote, "I might be able to satisfy one set of officials, but new ones, who come in, have entirely different views, and this, in a measure, is what has called for the large expenditures of money by me." He added that he and the other concessioners "have been in a very unsettled frame of mind for quite a number of years, as the business of all of us is a gamble anyway, ...with the uncertainties in their connections with the Government, and it is only a question of time before bankruptcy will hit all of us."¹⁸

In the past, the hotel and transportation companies had not paid a return on their gross receipts as the camping company and other companies did. Child paid only on meals, lodging, and passenger transport, not on gasoline, pictures, and other sales. Mather and the Department attorney decided that the money owed, \$25,000, would be forgiven, but new percentage rates would go into effect immediately. The new rates were 2.5 percent of the gross receipts of the hotel company and four percent of the gross receipts of the transportation company.¹⁹

By the end of the year, the matter was still not settled as Child did not like the terms. Child was upset with the government and fearful of a Congressional investigation into the concession operation. He hoped that the upcoming change to a Republican administration would be more favorable to his needs. Child appealed to Northern Pacific Railroad President, Howard Elliot, to be liberal in the company's expectations from his hotel and transportation companies.²⁰

In contrast, Jack Haynes's rates were readjusted downward as his company had been paying at a higher percentage than the other concessioners. His new contract reflected the same four percent of gross to the government that Child's new rate did.²¹

Sadly, one of the earliest and most respected

concessioners, F. Jay Haynes, died in March 1921. The park flags flew at half-mast for 30 days in his honor. In tribute to Haynes, Horace Albright wrote:

While due to his careful management and keen business acumen, all of Mr. Haynes's concessions in the park have proven satisfactory from a financial standpoint. He also had always the keen sense of obligation towards the park and its development as the property of the public. His dealings with the park officials, the public, his employees, and others was always characterized by a spirit of fairness, which stands out forcibly in the minds of those with whom he was associated. His splendid photographs of the park scenery have been widely distributed all over the world for many years, and their influence in bringing the National Park into its present prominence is beyond estimate.²²

Visitation in 1921 increased visitation to 81,651 people, with the rail travel figures showing a slight decrease.²³ Toward the end of the travel season, Howard Hays, President of the camping company proposed new services for visitors, housekeeping cabins. This type of cabin, which was already used at Yosemite and Mt. Rainier, would offer a furnished room with beds, wood supply, tables, chairs, and small cook stove.

A new request came before Mr. Albright in 1921. Jack Haynes requested permission for a former Army pilot to fly over the park taking aerial photographs. The pilot also wanted to take passengers up for a fee of \$1 per minute. Albright responded quite strongly:

We are very anxious to keep Yellowstone Park a wild place, and the one thing that would remove even its distant points from a state of wilderness would be the aeroplane. I think I told you one time how the use of aeroplanes in the park probably would affect people who come year after year and who desire to get away from all forms of civilization. Imagine, for instance, that you and I should take a trip into the Upper Yellowstone for a rest and recreation in that wonderful wild country. We think we have gotten away from automobiles, telephones, mail, and telegrams, and are cooking our bacon over a camp fire and reveling in the spirit of the wild country. Moose and elk are about us, grizzly bears are not far away. We are talk-



Roosevelt Lodge cabin interior. 1929.

ing about how fine it is to be away from civilization, when suddenly an aeroplane flies over and drops the *Chicago Tribune* right at your feet. Would it not make you sore?²⁴

In late January 1922, H. W. Child sent Albright the financial reports for both the hotel and transportation company, detailing past record keeping. Child hoped this report would satisfy any misunderstandings about his past business practices. Explaining that his transportation company had always assisted the hotel company with obligations, Child went on to state that this method of business was common knowledge in the Department of the Interior. He acknowledged the proposed new rates suggested by the Department the previous year, but wanted Mather to analyze the newly submitted annual report before implementing the rates. He stated that he was eager “to co-operate with the Government and work with it in all its Yellowstone Park activities, and I am particularly anxious to meet Mr. Mather’s desires whenever and wherever it is possible.” He added that “I realize that we have drifted apart on certain matters, and I, thru accustomed methods of doing business, have certainly had as much, or more, to do with this as anyone, but all along I have been willing and ready to do the right thing as I have seen it, always bearing in mind as a business man that the financial status of my properties must be very carefully watched, as I am engaged in a hazardous business.” Child reiterated the many changes in government personnel over the decades he had been associated with the park, and he reminded Albright that both he and his wife had worked with the American Civic Association and others towards the creation of the National Park Service. He wrote that he was “thankful now that the Service is so auspiciously

ciously established and carrying out a definite policy.” With a willingness to fully cooperate with Mather, he closed by saying, “We will try as always to keep a step ahead of the demands.”²⁵

In April, Secretary of the Interior Albert Fall responded to Child. Fall wrote that if Child would build a new Lake hotel this year (1922) and increase his transportation equipment plus complete a few other improvements, he would receive a new 20-year contract based upon the earlier stated rates. Fall did recognize the interdependence of the hotel and transportation companies.²⁶ The day after Fall sent the letter, Child presented his plans for an extensive addition to Lake Hotel to Albright in Washington. Evidently, Mather had already approved the floor plans, and much discussion about this plan had already taken place. With Child’s acceptance of the contract, Albright sent the plans to the National Park Service landscape architect, Daniel Hull, with instructions to address them as soon as possible so the company could begin work as of June 1 and have the facility completed by December 1.²⁷

In 1922, the Yellowstone Park Transportation Company had 125 eleven-passenger cars, 29 touring cars, and numerous freight and gasoline trucks. As a means of advertising, the company sent several of the bright yellow cars, so identifiable with the park, on a tour of the country in the off-season.²⁸

The questions of “who sells what” continued in 1922 when Pryor and Trischman requested permission to open a refreshment booth at the head of the Mammoth Hot Springs Terraces, an idea that Albright did not altogether oppose. But he did agree with Mather that no more unnecessary buildings should be erected in the park. Mather approved the drawings for the booth, but declined permission to build at that time. He compromised by allowing Pryor and Trischman to serve lunches and dinners at their curio and ice cream parlor, knowing that the hotel dining room and the camp dining rooms were always congested.

The following year, Pryor and Trischman requested permission to build and operate a “tourist food shop” in the Mammoth Public Auto Camp and sent plans drawn by Mr. Merritt Tuttle for approval. Albright solicited comments from Howard Hays of the camping company and William Nichols of the hotel company. Naturally, both objected to the proposal, citing impingement of their privileges. Hays pointed out that he had been given permission to open such a shop at Old Faithful as a “one year experiment” and



Park Curio shop at Mammoth Hot Springs. 1917.

that the year was not yet up. He stated that he could very well have opened it at Mammoth. After hearing the protests, Mather delayed granting approval.²⁹

Hays believed that a “tourist food shop” would meet the needs of the ever-increasing class of visitors known as “campers.” He also felt that the kitchen service should be extended to provide “hot pies (whole or by the slice), pastry, doughnuts, sliced roast beef and pork, bread, bottled milk, and other delicatessen items.”³⁰

Shortly thereafter, Hays received permission from Albright and Mather to open housekeeping camps at Old Faithful, Lake, Mammoth, and Canyon for the 1922 season. He was also given permission to operate a delicatessen at Old Faithful as a one-year experiment.³¹

At the end of 1922, Albright was proud of the improvements in the park, particularly in landscaping by both the government and the concessioners. He attributed the positive results to the work of National Park Service landscape architect, Daniel Hull. In thanking Hull, Albright wrote:

Much of this interest I feel must be attributed to your own personality which has made you a popular figure in Yellowstone Park, to your broad comprehension of our problems which has won for you the respect and confidence of everybody here, [and] to your ability to harmonize your work with the practical business requirements of the park, which has made it possible to plan improvements with the knowledge that you would not put theoretical obstacles in the way that would delay or make work impossible on account of greatly increased costs.³²